sound and light programme "Badhte Qadam" depicting the freedom struggle and national integration. A five-day Odissi dance festival was also held from the 1st April, 1993 at Khandagiri-Udaigiri caves. Other cultural programmes were organised and are also being presently organised in various parts of Orissa to commemorate the memory of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, other freedom fighters and legendary heroes of Orissa. These programmes are a continuing process and are organised in all States.

(c) The Song & Drama Division also engages local troupes/artists for its programme and this provide a source of income for the local artists.

Press Council's Report in respect of Bihar

192. SHRI S. S. AHLUWALIA : Will the Minister of INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that in its recent report the Press Council has concluded that the Press is under peril in the State of Bihar;

(b) if so, what are the details of the Press Council's report in respect of Bihar;

(c) what recommendations have been made by the Press Council to reduce tension between the administration and the Press in Bihar with details thereof;

(d) whether Government propose to implement the recommendations of the Press Council in respect of Bihar; and

(e) if so, by when it is likely to be implemented by the Government ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI K. P. SINGH DEO) : (a) and (b) The conclusions of the Report of Press Council are enclosed in Statement-I [*See* below].

(c) The suggestions and recommendations of the Press Council's Report are enclosed in Statement-II [See below].

(d) and (e) The Government have noted the recommendations of the Press Council. It is for the State Government of Bihar to take a view in the matter and implement the recommendations.

Statement—I

Summary of Conclusions

It appears that the relations between the Press and the authorities at the district levels, particularly in South Bihar, are not satisfactory. There is a measure of tension between them for a variety of reasons leading to unpleasant incidents and avoidable conflict. It appears that at the district level, the stringers, freelance journalist, small town journalists and journalists of small newspapers are the most vulnerable sections in the media who suffer humiliation, violence and harassment at the hands of intolerant and impatient elements in the administration.

The general brutalization of the social order has affected the behavioural pattern in general and in the administration, and could be assessed from the tenor of allegations and counter-allegations, the information and interpretation offered both by journalists and the officers. There is a lot of economic activity in South Bihar. That may be one reason for tension between administration and the Press. Political movements in the region may also have responsible. The other reason could be clash of ego. The sharpening of the caste tension, the aspirations of various sections, etc., find reflection in the media one way or the other, and the apparent increase in criminalisation of politics and the concomitant attitude of intolerance have combined to create a situation where the line between rights and duties seems to have been blurred at the district levels.

In the last few years, the atmosphere seems to have been poisoned more than would normally have been the case. The tension between the media and the administration in general has also led to more vigorous, and at times, highly aggressive exposure of corruption and irregularities. The lack of response by way of corrective steps in the administration leads to frustration, and in some cases, desperation among the media. The elements in the administration which lack the understanding of the role of the media and tolerance, react strongly in various ways, resulting in unpleasant incidents.

It appears that at the district level, the system of holding regular press conference by the D.C. has either been given up or such conferences are held very infrequently. Similarly, press releases, by way of authentic information on various incidents which the newspapers may like to cover, are not perhaps being issued regularly or these are not sent to the small newspapers or reporters and stringers. This lack of communication has led to tension between the authorities and journalists, leading to erosion of credibility of both the media and the administration.

The commercialization of the newspapers has also led to several consequences causing damage to the health of the Press and its credibility. Another unhealthy development is that political polarisation is infiltrating into newspapers.

Truth hurts and, therefore, even objective coverage attracts hostility of those who feel hurt and embarassed. The coarseness in behavioural pattern is inevitably reflected in the reactions and responses. The environment for the free and fearless exercise of freedom of Press has been gravely undermined. There is a general sense of insecurity not merely in terms of violence. Even big papers which should be able to function independently and which have their own protection against attempts to bully, are also not able to fully exercise their freedom and independence. The exercise of right to freedom appears to be selective, depending on which quarter is likely to feel hurt and has the capacity to hit back in variety of ways.

There is a deterioration in professional standards. Some journalists use their profession for their vested interests, for getting advantages. Some of those who enter the profession of journalism do not have proper training, have no commitment to the profession, and do not realise the importance of journalism in a democratic polity.

In most cases, the Committee tried to check up why and for what reason a journalist or a group of journalists was harassed or beaten up by police or others. The stook reply was that critical writing by the journalists provided the excuse for causing incidents of violence or harassment.

However overall impression that the Committees gained was that the tension between the media persons and authorities in Bihar has to be attributed to a combination of complex factors like criminalisation of politics, politicisation and commercialisation of the Press, mutual rivalry among different newspapers, anxiety of authorities not to be exposed by the Press, fear in the Press that their exposing authorities may be visited by retribution or reprisal, etc. Indeed, it is the impact of such factors in their totality which is much more than mere critical writings by the journalists in the newspapers that seem to have caused unhappy distortions in the situation. Freedom of the Press can survive in a certain atmosphere of tolerance, democratic decency aided by enlightened public opinion, a responsive administration and responsible and healthy Press.

Statement-II

Suggestions and Recommendations made by the Press Council of India

All steps must be taken to establish regular channels of communication at all levels between the media and the administration. The Police Control Rooms should provide all available information. The administration should be responsive to and tolerant of healthy criticism in the Press. It should come forward with the correct version.

The Press has to exercise the freedom with a sense of responsibility. If the authorities find that a newspaper or periodical is violating any law of the land, they can proceed against that newspaper within the bounds of that law. Subject to this, the authorities must create an environment in which free Press can perform its legitimate duty without fear.

The Press has an obligation towards itself to follow high standards of journalism, professional and personal integrity and protect its credibility as an objective media. The facts must be treated as sacred and should not be mixed with opinions and views. Of course, editorial opinion should be free and fearless.

Accreditation Committee should be regularly convened and consulted at regular intervals regarding accreditation and allied matters. Also that the Government must take advance action to reconstitute the Accreditation Committee whenever it is due. It is felt that the existing Committee may be allowed to function till the new Committee is constituted and notified.

The payments to newspapares and periodicals for publishing government advertisements should be made as promptly as possible so as not starve the newspapers, especially the ones belonging to small and medium category, of funds. Unnecessary economic hardships tend to curb the freedom.

Arrest, handcuffing and parading of journalists at Giridih was unfortunate. Authorities should ensure that such incidents of atrocities on journalists, who perform their professional and legitimate duties, should be avoided.

Administration at the district level should try to establish better relations with the Press. They should try to reduce the communication gap with the Press. This can be done by regularly issuing Press releases giving authentic information, holding regular Press conferences and briefings and establishing some sort of consultative machinery at district level. There should be Consultative Committees consisting of the D.C., the S.P., the DIO, some representatives of the media and public persons. Periodic meetings of such Consultative Committees will lead to better rapport between the Press and the Administration. It will also be useful for the Administration to designate an officer to whom journalists may contact for news.

Three or four court cases which are still there against journalists who had participated in the agitation against the Bihar Press Bill, 1982 should be withdrawn by the authorities, if considered advisable.

The Committee would go further and suggest that at district level throughout the country (not only in Bihar) there should be Consultative Committees to sort out problems between the Press and the Administration. Such a Consultative Committee could consist of the D.C., the S.P., the DIO, some representatives of the media and some public persons. This will improve the relations between the Administration and the Press and put it on a healthy footing.